DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 134 366 RC 009 636

AUTHOR Carlson, Robert V.
TITLE Rural Studies: Leadership Development Research Needs.
PUB DATE 26 Oct 76
NOTE 6p.; Paper presented at the Rural/Regional Education Association Conference (Albany, New York, October 26, 1976)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Career Education; Change Strategies; *Community Development; Community Involvement; Community Leaders; *Educational Administration; Ethics; Evaluation Methods; Group Dynamics; Interpersonal Relationship; *Leadership; Needs Assessment; Personnel Management; Planning; Political Influences; Public Relations; *Research Needs; *Rural Areas; Rural Development; Speeches; Technical Education; Workshops
IDENTIFIERS Quality of Life

ABSTRACT

Rural school and human service administrators' professional development needs can be categorized as technical, interpersonal, and intrapersonal in nature. Vermont surveys have indicated that the technical skills most needed are in the areas of public relations, career education, teacher effectiveness training, community involvement, administrative competencies, human service coordination, communications workshop, community needs assessment, planning skills, grantsmanship, evaluating methods, and personnel management; the interpersonal needs are political power, general interpersonal skills, group dynamics, and negotiation skills; the single intrapersonal need is ethics for administrators. It appears that the administration needs identified by both local and distant representatives are being influenced by the present state of administration knowledge and what is available. One dimension which is not identified in the interpersonal category is the "development of mutual support systems". How we can ascertain most scientifically the necessary knowledge and skills to affect rural school/community change and how we can best disseminate such knowledge are questions which have to be answered. The first step in the problem solving process is problem recognition, including recognition of facilitating or inhibiting factors; therefore, we need to begin by discussing what further knowledge is needed to develop viable rural school organizations. (JC)

Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original.

ED134366

Paper Presented at the Rural/Regional Education Association Conference
October 26, 1976, Albany, New York

RURAL STUDIES: LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH NEEDS

Robert V. Carlson
Professor
College of Education and Social Services
University of Vermont

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

For the past five and a half years, I have been associated with the University of Vermont as a faculty member whose primary responsibility has been teaching related administration and planning courses to prospective and currently employed administrators. In addition to these teaching responsibilities, I have been very involved working directly with public school personnel in regards to inservice training and school-community development projects. The College of Education and Social Services of the University of Vermont has a philosophical commitment of providing leadership and support services to the local schools of Vermont regardless of their capacity to pay for such services.

This commitment has resulted in a wide range of activities. Soon after my arrival in Vermont, my colleagues and myself in cooperation with members of the State Department of Education established a Management Development Institute (field-based inservice training for superintendents and principals). The State Department continues to manage this program with graduate credit approval from the University. In addition, we offer summer institutes designed to meet the professional needs of counselors plus human service and public school administrators.

Also included with these self contained conferences or institutes have been field-based course offerings (regular graduate level and/or especially oriented courses). Presently we are exploring more formalized procedures for identifying courses, adjunct faculty and locations for such off-campus courses.

In addition to the above teaching-training experiences, I have been involved in school-community development activities. These include a three-year project in a community in northeastern Vermont called Canaan, in which was pursued a system's planning model for addressing school/community needs. Other rural community involvements included the development of a Learning Center in Bradford, Vermont, and an evaluation project in a Parent-Child Center in Barton, Vermont.

RC009636

This background of experiences in very typical rural communities provides the backdrop for further analyzing the leadership needs of rural areas and their implications for research and subsequent professional development programs. For it seemed from our experience that if rural school/community development is to become a reality, better insight or knowledge is needed. It was very evident from our experience that outsiders (University persons) are not going to be able to impose an arbitrary standard for the quality of life in the local community, and the other side of the coin suggests that local indigenous leadership lacks sufficient knowledge and competence to challenge and revise the status quo which often represents a depressing and defeated state-of-being.

My secretary has been lovingly bending my ear for the past three months about sewerage treatment plants, mound systems, and open lagoons and spray irrigation. Don't laugh! I will make the analogy in a moment. What has turned her into a sewerage engineer is her concern for the quality of life in the rural community in which she lives. Her community is attempting to challenge the permit application of a New York based company to open an 80-store mall on an existing hay field. Obviously, a forty acre spread of buildings and parking lots is going to affect her community in terms of traffic, town services (sewerage, water, fire and police protection, road maintenance, state funds available for education based on the Miller formula,...and her list goes on ad infinitum), and the probability of future strip development. What depresses my secretary is the lack of knowledge and foresight of the community and its planning commissioners which resulted in zoning regulations that cannot legally prohibit the building of such a mall and the resultant change in her community's quality of life. And, not only did her community's citizens lack foresight on a community level, but they repeatedly refused to participate, or were uncooperative, in regional planning efforts.

The challenge of rural school/community development may not have the visual magnitude of traffic, congestion and environmental impact problems, but its impression upon the quality of life in rural areas is of equal import...and, may I add, very much intertwined with my secretary's anguishings.

In the remainder of the paper I would like to surface the kinds of competencies (knowledge and skills) which my experience suggests is needed to successfuly affect change at local school/community levels and reveal the competencies which related research and evaluation studies has identified in Vermont. (My secretary wishes there were a set of competency requirements for the selection of planning commissioners.) Hopefully a discrepancy analysis of the preceding will permit me to formulate needed areas of research concerning the preparation and training of rural school leadership.

First it seems necessary to clarify what is meant by rural school/community leadership. What is intended is to identify individuals, regardless of formal position or informal position in the school or community, who have persuasive abilities to motivate others to these desires, and finally can garner adequate support for implementing related activities which address such significant needs. In other words, the force to overcome the status quo can emerge from an individual or many individuals regardless of position in the community and/or its schools through whom progress toward certain ends can be achieved.

An example may help at this point. In the school/community development project in Canaan, Vermont, we were able to draw upon many persons both in the school and outside of the school who, with some technical assistance from our resource team, were able to initiate and carry through on a planning process which resulted in many significant changes. We were able to draw upon the potential talent and motivation of two classroom teachers (English and Home Economics) plus additional school and community people to a lesser degree, to take major responsibility for

managing the change process. The major need which was surfaced and guided to a reasonable solution was a problem of bilingualism. The school and community faced this head-on which resulted in hiring a bilingual principal and primary grade teacher, applied and received federal and state funds to hire bilingual classroom aides, secured a bilingual art teacher intern, and proceded to publish and verbalize most communications in both languages - French and English. This experience suggested that leadership can surface through many persons and at differing times and any attempt to cultivate leadership must recognize and adjust to this phenomenon.

To continue with my secretary's analogy, when citizens of her rural community realized the impending construction of the 80-store mall and it appeared no oppositional voice was to be heard, they quickly bonded together, advertised for additional citizen support, and divided into study committees to research traffic, sewerage, water, taxes, and marketing.

The competencies which seem to surface or be needed by different persons at different times might be grouped into technical, interpersonal and intrapersonal categories. Within the technical realm might be included such notions as project management skills, planning skills, communication skills, and analytical skills. Interpersonal dynamics suggests notions of conflict resolution and political strategies, the art of persuasion, group dynamics, and development of mutual support systems. (This area, by the way, is where my secretary's opposition group broke down. Community members were too timid and reluctant to seek outside support in the form of help from the regional planning commissioners, or political and economic persuasion by Burlington merchants bound to be hurt by the building of such a mall.) Philosophical commitment to bettering the quality of living, a belief in the potential and interests of those involved, persistance, openness to feedback and a tolerance for ambiguity are some potential intrapersonal qualities suited for initiating a process of change. Each of the above could be carried to serveral levels of specificity but the desire for brevity suggests broader levels of classification at this time.

Several attempts at the University of Vermont have been made through various institutes to surface rural school and human service administrators professional development needs. Using the above-mentioned classification, the following needs have been suggested by surveys, etc.:

<u>Technical Skills</u>

public relations
career education
teacher effectiveness training
community involvement
administrative competencies
human service coordination
community needs assessment
communications workshop
grantsmanship
evaluating methods
planning skills
personnel management

Interpersonal

political power
general interpersonal skills
group dynamics
negotiation skills

Intrapersonal

ethics for administrators

The above list which stemmed from administrators is not complete but is a reasonable sample of typical requests which are suggested to us through varying media. The first impression is a reasonable congruence between technical skills which I perceive as being needed and what administrators feel is needed. This may reflect our insight as to what is necessary to "administer" local rural school settings but it may also reflect the state of knowledge concerning the field of administration at the present time. In other words, we are both being influenced in identifying what is needed by what is available, i.e.: planning skills, methods of evaluation, community involvement, etc.

The competencies suggested by administrators in the interpersonal category are also reasonably congruent with my perception of what is needed. I have observed in the past several inservice workshops an increased acknowledgement of facing openly and honestly the political processes of education. In the past it has been difficult, to publicly discuss what everyone knew privately, that the role of rural school leadership is very much a political role necessitating being able to interpret varying special interests of various community and school subgroupings, each of whom feels its values should be properly manifested in the school and community. There seems to be a mounting body of evidence concerning the political nature of the school superintendent and principal's role and a growing interest in this body of knowledge by the respective role incumbents. It might be pointed out that much of the research is focused on urban and suburban settings leaving a sizeable gap concerning rural school politics. Thus politics in education is becoming a legitimate realm to explore in a much more informal and open manner.

One dimension which seems lacking within the interpersonal category and also there appears to be quite a dirth of need being identified by administrators concerning the intrapersonal category, is the notion of "development of mutual support systems". Another emerging body of knowledge often referred to as "organization development (OD)" suggests that people in organizations are sensitive to accomplishing the tasks of the organization but more often than not deny the feelings they experience in executing these tasks, e.g., loneliness, anxiety, fear of failure, anger, etc. The sublimation of these feelings can often impede the acquisition of certain task oriented goals and yet the slavish adherence to the denial of these feelings seems to continue to prevail. The point being if the exposure of feelings could be made more legitimate, human energy may be better focused and the real issues of anxiety or apprehension can become more clear thus permitting a closer examination of what really separates people around given local school-community issues. One often feels that what separates people is miscommunications versus fundamental value differences.

It is apparent that my remarks are probing a high realm of speculation particularly as one attempts to relate the implications of these *a priori* versus empirically oriented observations. This leads then to suggesting a point of this paper: how can we ascertain in a more scientific way what knowledge and skills are needed to effectively bring about orderly change in rural school communities which improves the quality of life for those persons living in such communities? Of course this immediately suggests a corollary question: how do we best disseminate such knowledge to practicing administrators?

I am beginning to sense a degree of congruity between those who face the day-to-day challenges of local rural school administration and the perception of outside persons like myself as to what is needed to be effective. However, there is also some important gaps, particularly as we view the notion of intrapersonal dimensions such as philosophical commitment to bettering the quality of living, a belief in the potential and interests of those involved, persistance, openness, etc., but also, very importantly, how do these qualities interface with those of others in a community. In other words, how can one reach out to others to find support and assistance without appearing inadequate and giving way to outside influence.

It is evident from my experience that we shall continue to rely heavily on conventional wisdom as to what is needed for maximizing leadership development and preparation. I generally feel the interaction between those distant from the local scene and those facing the local scene on a daily basis brings about reasonable proximations to guide training and strategies for local school administration.

What continues to disturb me, of course, is the lack of empirical knowledge which further challenges our assumptions about what is needed and what has greater potential for the improvement of rural school environments. It is this void which continues to haunt all of us as we attempt to face demanding choices under conditions of limited knowledge and resources. Decisions must be made and related actions will follow. How do we best determine which approaches will yield the results that serve those well in such rural areas.

I realize ending a presentation with an overwhelming set of questions can heighten feelings of frustration and despair. This is not my intent, but rather I hope that we can continue this discussion in order to face our dilemma and identify alternative courses of action. Can we model, if you will, the behaviors and methodologies which we see individually and collectively having potential in facilitating enlightened leadership of local rural school-community development. Obviously a tall order but it seems we gain more legitimacy with those we attempt to serve by involving ourselves in such a process. The first step in the problem solving process is recognition of a problem and recognition of how we are either facilitating or inhibiting such a problem. Let's discuss what further knowledge is needed to develop viable rural school organizations.

For as Albert Einstein stated in part: "The formulation of a problem is far more often essential than its solution..." Let's hope we can mount the insight and expertise necessary to address our knowledge needs concerning rural school/community development.